



United States Department of Agriculture

# Morrison Run Dispersed Camping Closure

## Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact



**Forest Service**  
**Allegheny National Forest**  
**McKean and Warren Counties, Pennsylvania**

**March 2021**

**Responsible Official:**

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**Additional information is available online at:**

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59362>

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# Introduction

The Morrison Run Dispersed Camping Closure environmental assessment proposed and analyzed the effects of prohibiting overnight camping along a 1.25-mile corridor adjacent to Morrison Run and Forest Road 176. This draft decision notice and finding of no significant impact documents the decision we are proposing to make.

The environmental assessment is incorporated by reference. A copy of the environmental assessment, and other project documents, is available online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59362>.

## Draft Decision and Rationale

The Forest Service intends to select the proposed action, which, as discussed in the environmental assessment, would prohibit overnight camping along a 1.25-mile corridor adjacent to Morrison Run and Forest Road 176. Implementation would result in the following actions:

1. Closure – to overnight camping – of a 1.25-mile long area along FR 176 and Morrison Run (500' on either side of the road). The area remains open to day use activities. See map in Appendix A of the environmental assessment.
2. Signage of this closure to inform the public of the camping prohibition.
3. Enforcement of the closure by Forest Protection Officers and Law Enforcement.

The Morrison Run area has had a number of issues associated with overnight camping. This includes litter, human waste and frequent violations of the 14-day stay limit. Critically, the area is not well suited for overnight camping. Forest Road 176 closely parallels Morrison Run. Currently, users are camping on a very narrow swath of land which is very close to the stream. Because of the location of the road and the steepness of the terrain, there are not suitable locations for overnight camping in this 1.25-mile corridor.

Closure of this area to overnight camping will have beneficial impacts to the various resources in the area including soils, water and wildlife. In addition, day users will be able to once again enjoy the area for picnicking and fishing. In the past, day users are often displaced from use of the area as long-term campers utilize the limited space along the creek.

Impacts to forest users will be minor since the Forest contains more than 600 dispersed campsites, including a number in relative close proximity to the area we are proposing to close.

Over the years, other alternatives and options have been considered and implemented, including public information sharing and increased enforcement of existing rules and regulations. In the end, though, the Morrison Run area is ill suited for overnight camping. There is simply not enough room for people to camp in this area and stay consistent with “Leave No Trace” guidelines of camping 200' from water.

## Public Involvement

Information regarding the purpose and need and proposed action was disclosed in the scoping document. The scoping document was posted online, and the public was informed of its availability by news release, legal notice, and a post to the Allegheny National Forest's Facebook page. A related newspaper article was published in the *Times Observer* (Warren Pennsylvania).

An opportunity to comment began with publication of a legal notice in the *Bradford Era* on January 25, 2021, and ended 30 days later. Comments were received from six respondents, with the majority focused on a nearby proposal related to dispersed camping in the Westline area. One commenter, however, did allude to the proposal here as “a bad idea, especially now.”

These comments were considered by the responsible official and project team leader while the environmental assessment was being written, and led to a narrowing of the proposed action.

The Morrison Run and Westline proposals were included in the same scoping document, and we had intended to prepare a single environmental assessment for both actions. In response to the comments received, however, we decided to move the Morrison Run and Westline proposals forward as separate projects. This allows us to move forward with actions needed to improve resource conditions in the Morrison Run area, while providing more time to consider comments received – and alternative courses of action – regarding the Westline proposal. Commenters were informed of this change by email on March 12, 2021, and no follow-up questions or concerns regarding this approach were received.

In addition, we also contacted the Absentee-Shawnee Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma, Cayuga Nation, Delaware Nation, Delaware Tribe of Indians, Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Oneida Indian Nation, Onondaga Nation, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, Seneca Nation of Indians, Seneca-Cayuga Nation, Seneca-Cayuga Tribe of Oklahoma, Shawnee Tribe, Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, Tonawanda Band of Seneca Indians of New York, and the Tuscarora Nation. No replies or requests for consultation have been received to-date.

Since the proposed action does not include ground disturbing activities, it has no potential to cause effects on historic properties. This determination was made in accordance with 36 C.F.R. 800.3(a)(1), and satisfies our obligations under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

### **Potentially Affected Environment**

The project area consists of National Forest System land along Morrison Run from the railroad viaduct just south of SR 6 to the Forest Service property line 1.25 miles south of the viaduct. The width of this project is 500’, given the narrowness of this stream’s valley. The east side of the stream and valley is predominantly private land, with a small piece of national forest on the east side between sites 2 and 3. The west side of the stream and valley is predominantly national forest with the exception of a small piece on the western bank north of site 2 and a wedge on the west bank between sites 3 and 4.

The potentially affected environment is limited to the local area since:

- the proposed action is focused on a small portion of National Forest System land;
- environmental effects are limited to the immediate area and waters downstream; and
- broader effects to dispersed recreation are unlikely since there are more than 600 other dispersed campsites available on the Allegheny National Forest, many of which are in close proximity.

## Degree of Effects

### **Short and Long-Term Effects, including Beneficial and Adverse Effects**

As discussed in the environmental assessment, the proposed action will have several beneficial effects:

- Soil compaction will be slower and less concentrated due to a reduction in the magnitude and duration of visitor use.
- Vegetation, including native grasses, forbs, trees, and shrubs will gradually recover due to a reduction in visitor use. They are, however, unlikely to quickly recover in the short-term unless planting and fencing are approved in the future.
- Non-native invasive species will spread at a slower rate. Fewer people will transport invasive species from one place to another, and it will be more difficult for invasives to become established due to less soil compaction and a reduction in disturbance to vegetation.
- There will be less disturbance to wildlife, and fewer human-wildlife conflicts.
- Water quality will improve as vegetation returns, which will both slow and filter overland waterflow before it reaches the stream. In addition, the disposal of grey water will likely decrease, and less human waste will enter the stream.
- Visitor conflicts will decrease since there will no longer be interactions between day users and overnight campers.

Few, if any, adverse effects will occur since visitors accustomed to camping in this area may utilize one of more than 600 other locations on the Allegheny National Forest. There may be a minor inconvenience to day users who use the fire rings for cooking, but these users may instead bring portable cooking equipment, a cooler, or rely on food that does not require cooking.

### **Effects on Public Health and Safety**

Implementation of this project may provide benefits in terms of reducing the potential for human waste adjacent to Morrison Run. It will also increase road safety since vehicles will no longer be parked on the road overnight.

### **Effects that would Violate Laws Protecting the Environment**

The project is consistent with applicable Federal, State and local laws for protection of the environment. For additional information, please see the discussion immediately below.

## **Consistency with Other Laws, Regulations, and Policies**

The project is consistent with all applicable laws, regulation, and policies. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Allegheny National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan: This decision is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long term goals and objectives, and all applicable standards and guidelines will be implemented.
- Clean Air Act: Implementation will not result in the exceedance of national ambient air quality standards.
- Clean Water Act: Implementation is consistent with the Clean Water Act.
- Endangered Species Act: A no effect determination was reached for all federally listed threatened and endangered species, species proposed for listing, candidate species, and designated or proposed critical habitat.
- Executive Orders 11988 (floodplains), 11990 (wetlands), 12898 (environmental justice), 13186 (migratory birds), and 13112 and 13571 (invasive species): This project is consistent with these and other executive orders. Implementation will not adversely affect floodplains, wetlands, or migratory birds. It will not adversely impact minority or low-income populations. It will not contribute to the spread of invasive species.
- Federal Cave Resources Protection Act: No known cave resources will be affected by this decision.
- National Environmental Policy Act: The environmental assessment, draft decision notice, and finding of no significant impact were prepared in accordance with the law and all applicable regulations.
- National Historic Preservation Act: The project has no potential to cause effects on historic properties. This determination was made in accordance with 36 C.F.R. 800.3(a)(1), and satisfies our obligations under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations.
- Regional Forester Sensitive Species: Implementation will have no impact on species identified as sensitive pursuant to Forest Service Manual 2670.
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act: No wild and scenic rivers will be affected by this project.
- Wilderness Act: No wilderness area will be affected by this project.

## Administrative Review

This draft decision is subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218, subparts A and B. Objections will only be accepted from those who submitted timely and specific written comments about this project during the 30-day public comment period in accordance with 36 CFR 218.5(a). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunity.

Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days after publication of a legal notice in the *Bradford Era*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the only means by which to calculate the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

The objection must contain the minimum content requirements specified in 36 CFR 218.8(d), and incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in 36 C.F.R. 218.8(b).

It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to 36 CFR 218.9. Timeliness is determined by:

1. the date of the U.S. Postal Service postmaster for an objection received before the close of the fifth business day after the objection filing period;
2. the agency's electronically generated posted date and time for email and facsimiles;
3. the shipping date for delivery by private carrier for an objection received before the close of the fifth business day after the objection filing period; or
4. the official agency date stamp showing receipt of hand delivery.

For emailed objections, the sender should receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgment of receipt of the objection, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely filing by other means.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed by mail, fax, express delivery, messenger service, or email: USDA-Forest Service, Eastern Region, Objection Reviewing Officer, 626 E. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53202; fax to 414-944-3963, Attn: Administrative Review Staff; email to: [objections-eastern-region@usda.gov](mailto:objections-eastern-region@usda.gov). Acceptable formats for electronic objections are text or html email, Adobe portable document format (pdf), and other formats viewable in Microsoft Office applications.

At a minimum, an objection must include the following:

1. The objector's name and address, with a telephone number, if available.
2. A signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for email may be filed with the objection).
3. When multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector (verification of the identity of the lead objector must be provided upon request).
4. The name of the proposed project, the name and title of the responsible official, and the name(s) of the national forest(s) and/or ranger district(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented.
5. A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project; if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider.
6. A statement that demonstrates the connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the designated opportunities for comment.

All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

## **Final Decision and Implementation**

If no objection is received, a final decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the objection filing period. If an objection is received, a final decision will not occur before all instructions identified by the Reviewing Officer have been addressed.

## **For More Information**

For information regarding this draft decision, please contact Rich Hatfield, Bradford District Ranger, Allegheny National Forest, 29 Forest Service Drive, Bradford, Pennsylvania, 16701. Phone: 814-363-6000. Email: [richard.hatfield@usda.gov](mailto:richard.hatfield@usda.gov). Additional information is also available online at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59362>.